

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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INFO USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 0403

E.O. 11652: GDS, 31-12-80

TAGS: MASS, NATO

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN F-104 REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

REFS: A. USCINCEUR DTG 221405Z JAN 74

B. USCINCEUR DTG 221406Z JAN 74 (2 MESSAGES)

C. USCINCEUR DTG 221407Z JAN 74

D. STATE 012937

BEGIN SUMMARY. USNATO SUGGESTS THAT WASHINGTON CONSIDER COMMITTING DEVELOPMENT FUNDS TO THE LIGHTWEIGHT FIGHTER PROGRAM. POSITIVE ASSURANCE TO ALLIES IN THIS REGARD WOULD HELP US CHANCES OF CAPTURING FIGHTER REPLACEMENT MARKET AND COULD AVOID THE SPECTRE OF A 1980 NATO FIGHTER FORCE COMPOSED OF A WIDE VARIETY OF SIMILAR, BUT NON-STANDARD, FIGHTERS WITH RESULTING HIGHER PROCUREMENT COST, HIGHER OPERATING COSTS, LOWER COMBAT CAPABILITY, AND DIFFICULTIES IN CROSS SERVICING. END SUMMARY. CONFIDENTIAL

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1. REFTELS HIGHLIGHT COMMON CONCERN OF ALLIES CONSIDERING F-104 REPLACEMENT ABOUT LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF ANY SELECTED AIRCRAFT. A DIRECTLY RELATED CONCERN IS THE QUESTION OF USG INTENTIONS TO PROCURE ONE OF THE US CANDIDATES.

2. ACCORDING TO STATE 012937, USAF PLANS TO INVESTIGATE DESIRABILITY OF DEVELOPING ONE OF THE CANDIDATE LIGHTWEIGHT FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. MISSION WOULD APPRECIATE MORE INFORMATION ON THIS. IF THE US WERE TO COMMIT DEVELOPMENT MONEY NOW, THE ALLIES WOULD PROBABLY AWAIT COMPLETION OF THAT DEVELOPMENT BEFORE DECIDING ON A NEW AIRCRAFT AND WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO THEN SELECT THE US AIRCRAFT. THE RESULT WOULD BE LOWER PRODUCTION COSTS FOR ALL COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING, HIGHER COMBAT CAPABILITY WHICH WOULD BE THE KEY FACTOR IN SELECTION VERSUS POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS; LOWER OPERATING COSTS AS A RESULT OF COMMON SPARE PARTS AND STANDARDIZED SYSTEMS, INTEROPERABILITY DURING COMBAT AS A RESULT OF STANDARDIZED SERVICING NEEDS, AND AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD IMPROVING THE US MILITARY BALANCE OF PAYMENTS ACCOUNT.

3. IF U.S. DOES NOT TAKE SOME SUCH ACTION, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THIS SPRING THAT THE BELGIANS COULD BUY THE FRENCH MIRAGE, THE DUTCH THE P-530 OR THE SWEDISH VIGEN, AND THE ITALIANS THE LOCKHEED LANCER. OTHER COUNTRIES MIGHT FOLLOW ALONG. IF THE US SHOULD THEN SELECT STILL ANOTHER LIGHTWEIGHT FIGHTER, THE TRAGEDY WOULD BE COMPLETE. NATO WOULD HAVE A 1980 FIGHTER FORCE COMPOSED OF A WIDE VARIETY OF SIMILAR, BUT NON-STANDARD, FIGHTERS WITH RESULTING HIGHER PROCURMENT COST, HIGHER OPERATING COSTS, LOWER COMBAT CAPABILITY, AND DIFFICULTIES IN CROSS SERVICING.

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